

Frenchmen in Dante's Shoes Sentimental Journeys through Italy in Early 19th Century Literature

Florian Mehlretter & Juana von Stein

French attitudes towards Italy and Italian culture in the 19th century are highly ambiguous, oscillating between two positions that seem to stand in direct contradiction to one another: on the one hand, a stance of superiority over a fragmented and backward country (or, indeed, a 'terra dei morti'),¹ an attitude which, from a postcolonial theoretical perspective, might be termed 'colonial' and would thus preclude any form of symmetrical dialogue or mutual understanding;² and, on the other hand, a deep admiration felt for geniuses such as Dante and Tasso.³ This article seeks to explore this paradox, drawing on some descriptions of literary journeys in Dante's footsteps by French writers. Our aim is to show that the asymmetry, which can be observed in many Italo-French intercultural contacts of the period, and indeed in the context of these literary journeys themselves, is in some cases transcended by a new hermeneutics. This new form of transcultural understanding can be seen in connection with the 'sentimental' reading strategies born in the 18th century.⁴ On a methodical

¹ Lamartine, who took up residence in Florence as a diplomat, derides Italy in *Le dernier chant du pèlerinage d'Harold* as a 'land of the past' ('Ô terre du passé') where humans have become 'de la poussière humaine'. The following lines provoked not only various literary reactions (cfr. Giuseppe Giusti's *La terra dei morti*), but also a duel between the Italian soldier Gabriele Pepe and the poet himself: 'Monument écroulé, que l'écho seul habite; / Poussière du passé, qu'un vent stérile agite; / Terre, où les fils n'ont plus le sang de leurs aïeux! / Où sur un sol vieilli les hommes naissent vieux, / Où le fer avili ne frappe que dans l'ombre, / Où sur les fronts voilés plane un nuage sombre; / Où l'amour n'est qu'un piège et la pudeur qu'un fard; / Où la ruse a faussé le rayon du regard; / Où les mots énervés ne sont qu'un bruit sonore, / Un nuage éclaté qui retentit encore! / Adieu! Pleure ta chute en vantant tes héros! / Sur des bords où la gloire a ranimé leurs os, / Je vais chercher ailleurs (pardonne, ombre romaine!) / Des hommes, et non pas de la poussière humaine!' (*Le dernier chant du pèlerinage d'Harold* [XIII], in: A. de Lamartine, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. by M.-F. Guyard, Paris, Pléiade, 1963, pp. 207-209; for the reception of Lamartine's poem, see A. O'Connor, 'L'Italia: La Terra dei Morti?', in: *Italian Culture*, 23 (2005), pp. 31-50).

² E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978/1985, pp. 1 f. Cf. for this background, which cannot be discussed at length in this article, H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London/New York, Routledge, 1994; G.C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in: L. Chrisman & P. Williams (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, New York, Columbia UP, 1994, pp. 66-111.

³ For French 19th century writers' attitudes towards Italy, see R. Noli, *Les romantiques français et l'Italie. Essai sur la vogue de l'influence de l'Italie en France de 1825 à 1850*, Dijon, Bernigaud et Privat, 1928; M.-M. Martinet, *Le Voyage d'Italie dans les littératures européennes*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1996; H. P. Lund & M. Delon (eds.), *L'Italie dans l'imaginaire romantique. Actes du colloque de Copenhague (14-15 septembre 2007)*, Copenhagen, Kongelige Danske Videnskaberne Selskab, 2008; É. Saliceto, *Dans l'atelier néoclassique. Écrire l'Italie, de Chateaubriand à Stendhal*, Paris, Garnier, 2013.

⁴ M. Caesar, *Dante. The Critical Heritage*, London/New York, Routledge, 1989, pp. 43-47, develops a similar hypothesis in a general sense of affective impact rather than the narrower concept of emotional identification pursued in this article.

level, this article will therefore combine its ‘postcolonial’ glance at an asymmetrical intercultural situation with what might be termed an archaeology of hermeneutics.

Literary pilgrimages and exoticist attitudes

The literary journeys considered here, whether real or fictional, are often undertaken in a spirit of devotion and therefore sometimes described as pilgrimages. Thus, the translator of Dante and poet, Antoni Deschamps, invokes Dante’s guidance for the poetic journey of his *Études sur l’Italie*:

De ta savante main, Dante, conduis mes pas,
Et sous l’ardent soleil ne m’abandonne pas.
Comme tu fus guidé dans ton fatal voyage,
Guide-moi, vieux Toscan, dans mon pèlerinage.⁵

For Deschamps, Dante’s guidance resembles more of a reservoir of poetic images and techniques than anything else,⁶ and his sketches of Italy are full-blown romantic *tableaux*, brimming with *couleur locale* and even the occasional dash of the exotic,⁷ but they are less influenced by Dante’s actual works than Deschamps’ self-assumed role as Dante’s romantic spiritual brother might have us believe. His (partly imaginary) literary journey is less of a scientific investigation of the places and landscapes that could have shaped the work of the great Italian writer and more of a sentimental journey – connected in this case with a collective French Dante ‘craze’.

In fact, more than any other poet, Dante appears to have fascinated the world of French art and literature throughout the 19th century. From Romanticism up to the *fin de siècle*, writers, painters and musicians alike are attracted both by Dante’s personality and his works.⁸ The Tuscan author becomes ‘le créateur de la poésie moderne’ (Villemain)⁹ and ‘père des muses modernes’ (Chateaubriand)¹⁰ or, quite simply, a kind of catalyst for the production of modern French literature.¹¹

⁵ Prologue - A Dante Alighieri (*Études sur l’Italie*), in: A. Deschamps, *Les dernières paroles, Poésies*, Brussels, Laurent, 1837, p. 159.

⁶ An example which is close to Petrarch (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 35.02), but which introduces the typical dantesque pseudo-comparison: ‘Et j’allais à pas lents et la tête baissée, / Comme celui qui porte une triste pensée’, *ivi*, p. 193. There are allusions to Dantesque characters as well, but these are rare, e.g. on the following page to Dante’s Ugolino (*ivi*, p. 194), and, of course, allusions to specific verses, such as in A. M. Rossini: ‘Honneur du beau pays où sonne le si’ (*ivi*, p. 207), cf. Inf XXXIII.79-80.

⁷ They are sometimes negative (‘Ah, ma belle Italie [...] Ne sens-tu pas la mort qui vient sur tes épaules, / Et, tandis que tu perds ta dernière heure en jeux, / Comme un voleur de nuit te saisit aux cheveux?’, A. M. Tom Massé, *ivi*, p. 192; the middle verse alludes to Petrarch’s *Italia mia*, RVF 128.99), sometimes exotic as in the ‘Orientalist’ ekphrasis of *Caravanne*, No. VII. For the exoticism of this poem and its pre-*parnassien* vocabulary, see P. Jourda, *L’Exotisme dans la littérature française depuis Chateaubriand*, I: Le romantisme, Paris 1938, reprint: Geneva, Slatkine, 1970, p. 185.

⁸ For Dante’s high popularity in other European countries see W. P. Friederich, *Dante’s Fame Abroad. 1350-1850. The Influence of Dante Alighieri on the Poets and Scholars of Spain, France, England, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States*, Rome, Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, 1950, as well as Caesar, *Dante*, cit., pp. 50-54 and 60 f. For a recent survey of the reception of Dante’s *Commedia* in pre-Romantic and Romantic Britain see A. Braidà’s *Dante and the Romantics*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁹ A.F. Villemain, *Cours de littérature française: tableau de la littérature du moyen âge en France, en Italie, en Espagne, et en Angleterre*, Paris, Didier, 1870, p. 290. Another important study of medieval and renaissance Italian literature of the French 19th century is P.-L. Guinguené, *Histoire littéraire d’Italie*, Paris, Michaud, 1811-1819.

¹⁰ F.-R. de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, vol. II, ed. by M. Levaillant & G. Moulinier, Paris, Pléiade, 1951, p. 228.

¹¹ For the reception of Dante in France, see A. Counson, *Dante en France*, Erlangen/Paris, Fr. Junge/Fontemoing, 1906; Friederich, *Dante’s Fame Abroad*, cit.; M. Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, Droz, Geneva, 1985; E. Costadura, ‘Parmi les ombres. Chateaubriand et Dante’, in: *Littérature*, 133 (2004), pp. 64-75; M. Lamy, ‘Dante, guide des romantiques français en Italie’, in: *La revue de l’art ancien et moderne*, 46 (1924), pp. 379-386; C. Pouzoulet, *La Construction du modèle de*

A host of translations, both in verse and prose, of *La Divine Comédie* is available on the French book market, with an apex in the middle of the 19th century.¹² Numerous poems (Barbier, Deschamps, Hugo, Soumet) and dramas (de Bornier, Sardou) allude to specific aspects, predominantly of the *Comedy*. Victor Hugo, for instance, uses Dante freely and with great enthusiasm for his own purposes both as a poet and a theorist,¹³ very probably without ever having taken the trouble to actually read more than a few passages.¹⁴ Moreover, Dante serves as a medium for heterodox religious and political ideas, culminating in E. Aroux' *Dante, hérétique, révolutionnaire et socialiste* of 1854.

Later on in this article, we shall see how authors like Ampère or Sainte-Beuve deplore this veritable 'Dantomania', which seems to grip French intellectuals as a group, and which is more often than not based on a few stock images, episodes and phrases from the first, fifth and thirty-third cantos of the Tuscan author's *Hell*.

These attitudes overlap, interact and intertwine in such a way that deep admiration for Dante as a poet can lead to an appreciation of (pre-modern) Italy; it can equally coexist in harmony with a certain distance regarding present-day Italy, but also with something like disdain of the very culture that has produced Dante: the *Trecento* and especially its Catholic background. This sometimes coincides with a classicist critique of the 'gothic' taste of the age of Dante. To be sure, the notion of literary genius as a lonesome form of existence in continuous opposition to its contemporary background helps to heal such contradictions, but this comes at the cost of some rather forced readings of Dante's work.

The reception of Dante among French intellectuals is surrounded by a historical situation that is not conducive to wholesale admiration for Italy and Italian culture in general. Travellers like Hippolyte Taine (1866) subject Italy to modern French standards and tend to find it wanting, assuming a 'colonial' superiority over a country steeped in tradition and lacking in technical, administrative, cultural and political progress.¹⁵ Even decidedly italophile authors like Stendhal – or, indeed, Deschamps, as seen above – sometimes combine their enthusiasm for Italy with exoticist attitudes of the type of Espagnolisme or even Orientalism (*Vie de Henri Brûlard*, chapter 40; cf. also the beginning of Gautier's *Voyage en Italie* with its trias of Venice, Granada and Cairo). They thus construct the colonial 'other' in a reductive and cliché-ridden way that serves more to establish the beholder's cultural identity than to further mutual understanding.¹⁶

On the other hand, reading a text as literature implies conferring a particular status on it. It implies considering it as a possible object of appreciation and

Dante comme poète national de l'Italie romantique: de Mme de Staël à Quinet, l'exemple de Claude Fauriel (1772-1844) et du réseau de ses relations, dissertation Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1996.

¹² See M. Scialom, 'La traduction de la *Divine Comédie*, baromètre de sa réception en France?', in: *Revue de littérature comparée*, 63 (1989), pp. 197-207, esp. p. 201.

¹³ See, for example, Hugo's poem *Écrit sur un exemplaire de la 'Divina Commedia'* (V. Hugo, *Œuvres poétiques*, vol. II, ed. by P. Albouy, Paris, Pléiade, 1967, p. 568, see also pp. 1456 f.). At the very beginning of the third part of the *Contemplations* entitled 'Les luttes et les rêves', Hugo seems to proclaim Dante as his fellow sufferer, not so much because of the exiled life they had in common (Hugo wrote the poem in 1843), but because Hugo sees Dante as a soul mate in a general fight against all comers (Hugo's *Les Burgraves* had just completely failed and was the last play ever written by Hugo). See also C. Ossola's short comment in 'Dante, poète européen (XIX^e et XX^e siècles)', in: F. Livi & C. Ossola (eds.), *De Florence à Venise. Études en l'honneur de Christian Bec*, Paris, Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2006, pp. 477-512, especially pp. 481 f.

¹⁴ See Counson, *Dante in France*, cit., pp. 168-174, and Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., pp. 173-208.

¹⁵ I. Grudzinska Gross, 'Hippolyte Taine's Polemical Vision of Italy', in: *Romanic Review*, 81 (1990), pp. 203-210, here p. 205 and 209. See also E. Caramaschi, 'L'image de la Renaissance italienne dans l'œuvre d'Hippolyte Taine', in: *Mélanges à la mémoire de Franco Simone. France et Italie dans la culture européenne*, vol. 3: *XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, Genève, Slatkine, 1983, pp. 485-536.

¹⁶ See above, note 2.

acknowledges the necessity of an effort to *understand* its point of view. Thus, an act of literary reception of its very nature tends to strengthen the position of the textual *other* and sometimes even to question the certainties and prejudices of the reading subject. We shall see that, as soon as there is a deeper interest in Dante's actual texts, reading strategies like assuming the author's point of view or emotional empathy can lead to an intercultural hermeneutics that transcends this 'colonial' situation in an interesting way.

Chateaubriand's Ambiguities

One might say that with Stendhal a new approach to travelling in Italy beyond the age of the Grand Tour comes into vogue in France; but Stendhal, apart from some general words of appreciation, says little about Dante.¹⁷ Our sample of literary travel writing¹⁸ therefore starts with another author, in whom one of the earliest moments of Romantic 'Dantomania' can be found: François-René de Chateaubriand, in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1848-1850), describes his period as ambassador to the papal court in Rome, in 1828, and incorporates long passages from the diary of his journey there. On his way through northern Italy, he makes a detour to pay homage to Dante's tomb in Ravenna.

As Raymond Pouillart has shown,¹⁹ the scene evoked by Chateaubriand owes much to the description of an only slightly earlier visit to the same place by the historian and Dante connoisseur, Antoine C. Valery, who, thirteen years before Chateaubriand's book, published his *Voyages historiques et littéraires en Italie*. A telling symptom of this debt lies in the presence, in either text, of allusions to Alfieri's poetic effusions in front of Dante's grave²⁰ and, later, to Dante's description of the Arsenal in Venice.²¹

Valery knows his Dante well and quotes freely from his texts in far more numerous and more varied circumstances than Chateaubriand (Michael Pitwood has shown the limits of the latter's knowledge of Dante).²² Predominantly pursuing antiquarian interests, he seeks out the remains and the sites of historic events, inscriptions, buildings and monuments, and searches for ancient manuscripts of all sorts, including the works of Dante; but his journey is not a Dantean pilgrimage of the type explored in this article. In fact, Chateaubriand is at pains to distance himself from Valery (whom he does not mention), both chronologically²³ and regarding the kind of experience he claims to have had. For Chateaubriand's is an emotional reaction and not an antiquarian one:

¹⁷ For Stendhal's appreciation of Dante (in *Racine et Shakespeare*) and his rather selective knowledge of Dante's works see Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., pp. 134 and 140.

¹⁸ For French travels in Italy, see also: É. & R. Chevallier, *Iter Italicum: les voyageurs français à la découverte de l'Italie ancienne*, Genève, Slatkine, 1984.

¹⁹ R. Pouillart, 'Comment Chateaubriand lut Dante', in: *Les Lettres Romanes*, 4 (1965), pp. 335-380, especially pp. 375-378.

²⁰ A.C. Valery, *Voyages historiques et littéraires en Italie: pendant les années 1826, 1827 et 1828, ou l'indicateur Italien*, Bruxelles, Hauman, 1835, XI, v, p. 322; cf. Chateaubriand, *Mémoires*, vol. II, cit., p. 228.

²¹ Valery, *Voyages*, cit., VI, xx, p. 146; Chateaubriand, *Mémoires*, vol. II, cit., p. 782; see below.

²² Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., p. 78, shows that even *Le Génie du Christianisme*, in which Dante is extolled as a paragon of Christian poetry, paints an incomplete and one-sided picture of the *Comedy* and stops short of the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.

²³ Rather than writing this passage anew for the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* in the 1830s or 1840s, Chateaubriand insists on quoting from the diary of his journey, supposedly written in the late 1820s, and thus long before the publication of Valery's book.

A Forli je me suis détourné de ma route pour visiter à Ravenne le tombeau de Dante. En approchant du monument, j'ai été saisi de ce frisson d'admiration que donne une grande renommée, quand le maître de cette renommée a été malheureux.²⁴

The conditions of his *frisson* appear to be easily explained by the romantic idea of the unhappy genius. Nonetheless, it is not mere admiration for Dante's achievement that causes Chateaubriand to shiver but, rather, a strong form of emotion, be it pity or identification. After all, Chateaubriand, who – like Lamartine after him²⁵ – sees himself as sharing the Tuscan poet's double vocation as writer and politician,²⁶ casts himself as a kind of new Dante. This results in a curious vision of Dante's Beatrice manifesting herself by the tomb of the poet ('Béatrice m'apparaissait; je la voyais telle qu'elle était lorsqu'elle inspirait à son poète le désir *de soupirer et de mourir de pleurs*'), in the course of which Chateaubriand remembers – and mistranslates²⁷ – lines from one of Dante's *canzoni* and calls their author 'le père des muses modernes' and 'le créateur d'un nouveau monde de poésie'. He reflects on Dante's love for Beatrice, his neglect of her and his penitence, recounts anecdotes concerning Dante's exile and the history of his tomb, and finally declares a decided preference of Dante to Lord Byron, on grounds of age and sorrow ('que me faisaient Childe-Harold et la signora Giuccioli en présence de Dante et de Béatrice! Le malheur et les siècles manquent encore à Childe-Harold').²⁸

As Edoardo Costadura has shown, such knowledge and esteem of Dante as Chateaubriand acquired over the years is due to his gradually evolving biographical approach. This in turn leads to an identification with Dante the man, chiefly based on the fate of exile common to both.²⁹ And indeed, in the passage mentioned above, Chateaubriand's emotional approach is based on identification. There might be some significance in the fact that in the very year of his pilgrimage to Dante's tomb at Ravenna (October 2nd, 1828 according to his own date specifications), Chateaubriand starts planning his own final resting place. Since the autumn of 1828, he has been demanding a piece of land on the tiny and uninhabited island of Grand Bé on which to construct his own, megalomaniac-romantic tomb.³⁰ Chateaubriand's type of identification, however, hardly goes beyond a mere appropriation of Dante and largely aims to create a literary image of his own self.

Identification is, of course, the very paradigm of romantic reading (emerging from 18th century *Sentimentalism* and *Empfindsamkeit*) and it is hardly surprising that French 'Dantomaniacs' of the 19th century, if they read their idolised poet at all (rather than just fantasising about him), do so in an identificatory manner. The reading habit described here thus *partakes* of a greater movement, but it also *contributes* to this more general tendency, not least by anchoring it, for instance, in a specifically romantic interpretation of one of the most famous passages of the *Inferno* itself, the episode of Paolo and Francesca.

²⁴ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires*, vol. II, cit., p. 228.

²⁵ In his 'Avertissement de la nouvelle édition' of *La chute d'un ange*, Lamartine compares his work – though in a fairly self-effacing way, as Friederich remarks – to the *Commedia*; (A. de Lamartine, *La chute d'un ange. Épisode*, Paris, Hachette, 1847, p. 8; Friederich, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, cit., p. 151).

²⁶ Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., pp. 84 f., mentions this analogy as a possible motivation for Chateaubriand's interest in Dante and analyses Lamartine's interest in the parallelism of his own and Dante's double vocations (*ivi*, p. 156).

²⁷ It has to be conceded that the very attempt to translate Dante's lyric poetry shows a genuine interest beyond the usual standard in the 1820s, as Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., p. 81, shows; Pitwood also indicates where Chateaubriand's translation goes wrong.

²⁸ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires*, vol. II, cit., p. 229.

²⁹ Costadura, 'Parmi les ombres', cit., p. 68.

³⁰ Chateaubriand, 'Préface', in: *Mémoires*, vol. I, M. Levaillant & G. Moulinier (eds.), Paris, Pléiade, 1951, p. 3 and p. 1119. His request was granted in 1831.

This can be seen most clearly in Alfred de Musset's fragment 'Le Poète déchu'. Musset recounts how he once recited the last 25 verses of *Inferno* V several times (to the annoyance of his sisters) and how, at the end, where Dante the pilgrim faints and falls to the ground, he had a very similar experience: 'je me laissai aller à terre en pleurant'.³¹ Such an empathetic reaction presupposes a particular interpretation of this passage in Dante. As is well known, the fall of Paolo and Francesca follows their joint reading of a chivalric romance. When they read of the kiss bestowed by the knight upon the married queen, they kiss as well and find a violent end (cf. *Inf.* V, 90; V, 107). Dante the pilgrim listens to their tale and faints out of emotional sympathy, but the final verse of the canto 'come corpo morto cade' (*Inf.* V, 142) casts a dubious light on that sympathy and its possible moral or theological implications.

The romantic interpretation of this reading scene, however, is typically not that of a cautionary tale. Whether or not the episode is perceived as being an implicit rebellion against God's (in-)justice (as seems to be the case in Victor Hugo's speech for the six-hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth),³² reactions like Musset's identificatory swoon imply that Dante faints out of a morally justified empathy.

Musset uses Dante's episode in his fiction as well, and there again he avoids any negative colouring of it. He introduces it as a *mise en abyme* of the main diegetic level in a short story (*Emmeline*), and so does Balzac (*Un lendemain*); an even more elaborate mirroring of the reading scene between Paolo and Francesca occurs in Prosper Mérimée's *Colomba*, where the recitation of *Hell* canto V by Orso to Miss Nevil precedes and prefigures their later love story, just like the love story of Galehaut and Guinevere leads to that of Dante's ill-fated couple.³³ Thus, romantic reading habits shape the interpretation of Dante's text and even seek their justification from it. Empathetic or identificatory reading is the dominant approach to Dante, and Chateaubriand's antics in front of the Ravenna tombstone are just one example among many.

But Dante is also an important presence in the Italian landscape as described by Chateaubriand. Following again Valéry's account, Chateaubriand's impression of the arsenal of Venice on a journey to the lagoon in 1833 is measured against Dante's evocation of it in *Inferno* XXI, 7-15.³⁴ The Austrian authorities oppress the Italian intelligentsia, and under their occupation, the arsenal, once a place of power and of technology, has become a desert of desolation and inactivity. As opposed to the hustle and bustle described by Dante,

[...] tout ce mouvement est fini; le vide des trois quarts et demi de l'arsenal, les fourneaux éteints, les chaudières rongées de rouille, les corderies sans rouets, les chantiers sans constructeurs, attestent la même mort qui a frappé les palais.³⁵

The 'father of the modern muses' is associated with a country that is not just not very modern, but dead. This is especially true of Rome, home of the poetry of ruins and a thoroughly backward state before the arrival of Napoleon. In his description of his

³¹ A. de Musset, *Œuvres complètes en prose*, M. Allem (ed.), Paris, Pléiade, 1951, p. 331, quoted by Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., p. 212.

³² Hugo sees Dante as attacking the tyrannous order of hell in this letter, to be read in public during the ceremonies in Florence in 1865 and published later in *Actes et paroles*. See Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., p. 195. The fact that Hugo likens Dante to the enlightenment philosopher of law, Beccaria, in this context, suggests that Dante's rebellion against hell is not just directed against its cruelty as such, but against the type of justice upholding it.

³³ Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., collects these instances of the use of Dantean motives on pages 212, 236 and 252.

³⁴ Cfr. Valéry, *Voyages historiques*, cit., VI, xx, p. 146.

³⁵ Chateaubriand, *Mémoires*, vol. II, cit., p. 782.

embassy to Rome, Chateaubriand asserts the superiority of the modern form of civilisation brought to Rome by the French under Bonaparte:

Les Français, en traversant Rome, y ont laissé leurs principes: c'est ce qui arrive toujours quand la conquête est accomplie par un peuple plus avancé en civilisation que le peuple qui subit cette conquête, témoin les Grecs en Asie sous Alexandre, témoin les Français en Europe sous Napoléon. Bonaparte, en enlevant les fils à leurs mères, en forçant la noblesse italienne à quitter ses palais et à porter les armes, hâtait la transformation de l'esprit national.³⁶

Yet, at the same time, within a basic opposition of 'civilisation versus barbarity', he assigns the side of the barbarians to the French, with only a slight hint of irony ('mesquins barbares') that, moreover, disappears as soon as Chateaubriand develops his description of the living arrangements of foreigners among the ruins of ancient Roman greatness:

Mais, quels que soient les changements de mœurs et de personnages de siècle en siècle en Italie, on y remarque une habitude de grandeur, dont nous autres, mesquins barbares, n'approchons pas. Il reste encore à Rome du sang romain et des traditions des maîtres du monde. Lorsqu'on voit des étrangers entassés dans de petites maisons nouvelles à la porte du Peuple, ou gîtés dans des palais qu'ils ont divisés en cases et percés de cheminées, on croirait voir des rats gratter au pied des monuments d'Apollodore et de Michel-Ange, et faisant, à force de ronger, des trous dans les pyramides.³⁷

The memory of Roman world dominance lives on, then, not just in the ruined monuments, but also in the present-day Roman population. The 'civilised' foreigners in their comfortable diggings seem like rats in comparison, whereas (in a different chapter) even the less aristocratic inhabitants of ruined palaces (like the Villa Madama) retain the dignity of the noble savage – or, at any rate, are compared to nicer animals: 'Dans ces architectures changées en fermes je ne trouve souvent qu'une jeune fille sauvage, effarouchée et grimpante comme ses chèvres'.³⁸

In the *Mémoires*, Italy is presented as a field of ruins, less civilised than Napoleonic, or post-Napoleonic, France, but at the same time more so; it has an ancient greatness that the other European nations lack.³⁹ The relationship between France, as a once occupying and even civilising nation, and Italy, the weak, colonised pastoral idyll, becomes ambiguous, between French dominance and Italian cultural supremacy.

Ampère's Hermeneutics

These memoirs of Chateaubriand's refer to travels in 1828 and 1833. In 1839, a Dante enthusiast of a younger generation, the literary historian Jean-Jacques Ampère, son of the eminent physicist, publishes an account of what is probably the first *Voyage dantesque* in the sense of an Italian journey exclusively devoted to Dante, first in the *Revue des deux mondes*, later in book form.⁴⁰ Writing four years after the publication of Valéry's *Indicateur italien*, Ampère, too, has to react to the historian's erudite

³⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 252 f.

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 253.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 363.

³⁹ For the role of Dante in the construction of cultural and national identities within an evolving modern Europe, see A. Audeh & N. Havely (eds.), *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century. Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; for France especially the essays by A. Audeh ('Dufau's La Mort d'Ugolin'), and J. W. Thomas ('Dante and Fabre d'Olivet').

⁴⁰ The first instalment appeared in *Revue des deux mondes*, 4, 8, January 1839. We quote the *Voyage dantesque* following the edition in: J.-J. Ampère: *La Grèce, Rome et Dante. Études littéraires d'après nature*, Paris, Didier, 1870.

passages on Dante, but unlike Chateaubriand, he does so not by concealment, but by answering back and contradicting Valery where necessary. A case in point is the question of the authorship of the epigraph on Dante's tomb, according to Valery probably by the poet himself, according to Ampère most certainly not;⁴¹ or Valery's hazardous hypothesis that Dante defended his thesis *De aqua et terra* as late as 1320 in Verona, which Ampère doubts.⁴²

Similar to Chateaubriand's approach, Ampère's perspective is more poetic and more emotional than Valery's, yet, on the whole, a lot more systematic and historically informed than the passages on Dante in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. In his preface, Ampère deplores the Dante craze of his age, which results in superficial and banal appropriations of very limited parts of Dante's oeuvre:

Oh! le bon temps pour les amis de Dante et de Shakspeare [sic] que celui où tous deux étaient traités de barbares! Cependant [...] on ne peut abandonner ses affections littéraires, parce qu'il est du bon air d'en afficher de pareilles. Il faut être fidèle au génie et à la vérité *quand même*; [...] Enfin, je suis résolu à persévérer dans mon amour pour la poésie de Dante, bien que ce soit aujourd'hui une fureur universelle, en France et en Italie, d'admirer à tout propos et hors de propos l'auteur de *la Divine Comédie*, que presque personne ne lisait il y a soixante ans.⁴³

His *Voyage dantesque* offers a deeper insight both into Dante's works, especially the *Divine Comedy* (all of it, not just the fashionable *Inferno*), and into his world, the Italy described or evoked in the poetry. The latter aspect is vital, not only to justify Ampère's voyage, but even more so for the methodology adopted in the book.

Ampère's point of departure is one of literary 'criticism' in a literal sense: In order to assess and appreciate the precision of Dante's descriptions, his ability to crystallise reality in poetic imagery, one has to stand on the tower from which he may have gazed, one has to cross the bridge he crossed.⁴⁴ This idea of appreciating Dante's exact descriptions by checking them on the spot is already present in Valery.⁴⁵ But Ampère integrates this in a much more elaborate and mature theory of literature. For him, it is this poetic gift of an immediate and exact grasp of the surrounding world and its integration in a more general and abstract vision that lies at the heart of Dante's greatness:

[...] la poésie de Dante est à la fois ce qu'il y a de plus général et de plus particulier: Pour acquérir de cette poésie un sentiment vif et complet, il est bon de descendre du premier point de vue au second. Après avoir reconstitué, par l'étude, l'édifice théologique que Dante a élevé, et l'état social qu'il a dépeint, il est bon de voir ce qu'il a vu, de vivre où il a vécu, de poser le pied sur la trace que son pied a laissée. Par là son génie n'est plus seulement en rapport avec les idées et l'histoire de son siècle, il devient, pour nous-mêmes, quelque chose de vivant, d'intime, de familier; de passé il devient présent, pour ainsi dire. On comprend mieux, on sent mieux surtout cette poésie, en présence des objets qui l'ont inspirée; elle est là comme une fleur sur sa tige, avec ses racines, ses rameaux et ses parfums.⁴⁶

This remarkable passage contains what might be described as the seeds of several critical traditions that were to become influential over the following century. In

⁴¹ Valery, *Voyages historiques*, cit., XI, v, p. 323; Ampère, *Voyage dantesque*, cit., p. 346.

⁴² Valery, *Voyages historiques*, cit., V, xxi, p. 94; Ampère, *Voyage dantesque*, cit., pp. 325 f.

⁴³ Ampère, *Voyage dantesque*, cit., pp. 231 f.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 237.

⁴⁵ Cfr. Valery, *Voyages historiques*, cit., XVII, iii, p. 475.

⁴⁶ Ampère, *Voyage dantesque*, cit., p. 233.

accordance with literary historians such as Ozanam⁴⁷ in his own epoch, Ampère acknowledges the necessity of a historical reconstruction of the *Comedy's* encyclopaedic and philosophical dimensions. Yet, at the same time (Ampère argues on a line of argument later to be developed by reception theory), in order to establish its status as poetry, it has to be read by each generation of readers within their own horizon and in relation to their own experience of life.⁴⁸ This is clearly a hermeneutic, reception oriented approach, yet slightly less geared towards the cognitive than its German counterparts (in the tradition of Schleiermacher). Not only does one *understand* the texts better ('on comprend mieux'), one can *feel* them better ('on sent mieux'), if one experiences the physical world to which they relate. It is no coincidence that the book edition of Ampère's *Voyage* bears the subtitle 'études littéraires d'après nature'. There is clearly an element of positivistic causality in the final image of this paragraph ('ses racines'), but there is also a sense of context ('ses rameaux') and, most of all, immediate sensual perception ('ses parfums'); the poetry is not just an object of analysis, it can be made to 'flower', if regarded in this manner ('une fleur sur sa tige').

It is, thus, a special version of what German hermeneutic theories of a later period would call *Einfuehlung* (Dilthey),⁴⁹ that leads the French critic on his travels – a more sensual identification that makes Ampère put himself, so to speak, in Dante's shoes. It also helps to transform the vague identification favoured by Chateaubriand into something more precise; and it will (as we shall see) even turn Chateaubriand's ambiguities over the respective state of civilisation of the French and Italian peoples into a more fruitful intercultural dialogue.

Of course, Ampère's journey is, just like Chateaubriand's, a sentimental one. The imagination of the traveller leads to moments of emotional identification with the exiled Dante, who is depicted as erring between the steep slopes of the Apennines. Dante's sublime art itself can be recognised in that majestic landscape, which may have inspired it, and moreover, his religious fervour lives on in popular traditions. Thus, Italy can be read as a memorial of Dante's poem.⁵⁰

But according to Ampère, there is also a direct tradition for Dante's imagery, especially his vision of hell, in the paintings of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, up to Michelangelo and Raphael. Only after the Counter Reformation does this tradition fade out, to be replaced by the well-made, but weak works of a Guercino or a Caraccio.⁵¹ Dante's is, therefore, a native form of the sublime, an archaic strength. His works contain the truly 'naïve' form of medieval chivalry, as opposed to the more reflexive later versions elaborated by Ariosto and Tasso. And this is the reason why, in Ampère's view, among the Nazarene frescoes of the Casino Massimo in Rome, the Dante room is much more successful than those devoted to the two renaissance poets, for Nazarene art strives precisely for such naïveté.⁵²

Ampère's loving search for Dante's Italy is very profound. This identification, on the part of a Frenchman, with Dante's pre-modern Italy helps Ampère question even

⁴⁷ F. Ozanam, *Dante et la philosophie catholique au XIII. siècle*, Paris, Debécourt, 1839. A complete edition of Ozanam's works was undertaken in 1873 by J.-J. Ampère. For the Dante philologists, Villemain, Fauriel and Ozanam, see also M. Caesar, *Dante*, cit., p. 60.

⁴⁸ For similar arguments, see H.R. Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* (= *Konstanzer Universitätsreden* no. 3), Konstanz, Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1967.

⁴⁹ See W. Dilthey, 'Das Verstehen anderer Personen und ihrer Lebensäußerungen', in: idem, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Berlin, Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1910.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ampère, *Voyage dantesque*, cit., p. 298.

⁵¹ Cf. *ivi*, p. 316.

⁵² Cf. *ivi*, p. 309.

some of the 'received ideas' of his own nation. In the 1830s, one of the most obvious points in favour of the French over the Italians would be that the former have succeeded in becoming a *Grande Nation*, whereas the latter have not and are therefore a fragmented group of small states at the mercy of other nations, most notably the Austrians in the north of the peninsula. Now, while Ampère seems to deplore this and, at any rate, expresses his disfavour against the Teutonic invaders,⁵³ he also recognises that Italy's fragmentation into tiny states in the early modern period lies at the root of the cultural riches produced by the competition of many centres:

c'est à ce fractionnement poussé à l'infini qu'elle a dû la vie multiple qui lui a fait produire tant d'hommes, élever tant de monuments, créer tant de chefs-d'œuvre. Ça a été aussi, on doit le reconnaître, la cause de son épuisement et de sa chute. Les Italiens regrettent aujourd'hui de n'avoir pas formé un grand État comme la France; et nous, nous sentons les inconvénients de cette absence de toute vie locale, qui fait la stérilité intellectuelle de nos provinces et nous rend la vraie liberté si difficile.⁵⁴

In a similar way, Stendhal praises the freedom of the small Italian city-states, which fostered individualism and the rise of the arts.⁵⁵ By emphasising the strong points of the Italian situation – the drawbacks of which are, however, not obscured –, Ampère, on his *Voyage dantesque*, gains an important insight into one of the weaknesses of French intellectual life in the 19th century: the absence of regional intellectual activity, one of the causes of an even greater disadvantage, namely, the lack of any 'real freedom'.

Thus, *Einfuehlung* can be transformed into a platform of intercultural dialogue and turned to intellectual advantage. The hidden backside of the *Grande Nation*, the intellectual sterility of its provincial life usually eclipsed by the splendour of its achievements, becomes visible and can be criticised.⁵⁶ Empathetic reading of the cultural 'other' thus helps discover the blind spots of one's own culture, it can become the basis of a critique from an outside point of view.

Sentimental Readings and Intercultural Hermeneutics

Were one to write an archaeology of hermeneutics in the romantic age, these could be prime exhibits, closely linked as they are to the romantic sensibility and its dominant reading techniques. Both in Chateaubriand's and in Ampère's case, *Einfuehlung* in the sense described above produces a better understanding of the self and of the other (albeit in different ratios and different ways) and a more balanced view of French and Italian culture.

⁵³ Cf. *ivi*, p. 336.

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 279 f.

⁵⁵ See Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., p. 133, for comments on Stendhal's *Des périls de la langue italienne* and *Mémoires d'un touriste*. For constructions of the Italian renaissance by French writers, see also: S. Dresden, 'The profile of the reception of the Italian Renaissance in France', in: *Itinerarium italicum. The profile of the Italian Renaissance in the mirror of its European transformations. Dedicated to Paul Oskar Kristeller on the occasion of its 70th birthday*, H. A. Oberman & T. A. Brady (eds.), Leiden, Brill, 1975, pp. 119-189; U. Schöning, 'L'Italie et la littérature italienne chez Mme de Staël, Guinguené et Sismondi: l'historiographie littéraire et l'opposition politique', in: Lund & Delon, *L'Italie dans l'imaginaire romantique*, cit., pp. 201-224; M. Wiele, *Die Erfindung einer Epoche. Zur Darstellung der italienischen Renaissance in der Literatur der französischen Romantik*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr, 2003.

⁵⁶ This is not an isolated phenomenon. A more poetic and more general critique of French modernity can be found in Saint-René Taillandier's epic *Béatrice* (1840), again fuelled by elements taken from pre-modern Italy, this time Dante's myth of Beatrice (see Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., pp. 117 ff.).

One might object here that such mutual understanding is but an idle dream that cannot be defended on theoretical grounds. However, the philosopher Hans Herbert Kögler has recently argued convincingly against radical positions of anti-hermeneutic scepticism as upheld by thinkers like Michel Foucault or Richard Rorty.⁵⁷ Kögler shows a possible way out of the dilemma of naïve ethnocentricity and ‘bad relativism’⁵⁸ which seems to follow from Foucault’s insights into the power structures of discourse. The first methodical step, according to Kögler, is to accept the point of view of the other as given and real; a second step would then transform this hypothesis into a dialogue unhampered by one’s own preconceptions. But how can this be? Has Rorty not shown the impossibility of questioning one’s own preconceptions from a neutral vantage point outside of them?⁵⁹ This is where in Kögler’s account an element of fiction comes in. He suggests that we play a game of taking the point of view of our dialogue partner, regardless of its content, thus achieving a standpoint outside of our own conceptual world, from which to criticise our preconceptions. The last step is to revert to our initial position, which will now, however, be cleared of any assumptions that may have failed to resist the critique brought to it from the fictionally assumed viewpoint of the ‘other’. In this final phase, a critical discussion with the other, be it another individual or a foreign culture, becomes possible.⁶⁰

It seems immediately obvious that this rather complicated procedure, hard to achieve though it may be in everyday communication, is standard in literary reception such as described here (especially with regard to fiction and its poetics of make-believe).⁶¹ Interestingly, in his *Voyage en Italie*, none other than Hippolyte Taine, whom we mentioned above as a traveller with a tendency to subject everything to his own French standards, formulates an intuition of just such a process:

Avec de la réflexion, des lectures et de l’habitude, on réussit par degrés à reproduire en soi-même des sentiments auxquels d’abord on était étranger; nous voyons qu’un autre homme, dans un autre temps, a dû sentir autrement que nous-mêmes; nous entrons dans ses vues, puis dans ses goûts; nous nous mettons à son point de vue, nous le comprenons, et à mesure que nous le comprenons mieux, nous nous trouvons un peu moins sots.⁶²

This paragraph from the beginning of Taine’s book stresses the temporal dimension especially of literary hermeneutics, which is, of course, highly relevant to the reception of an author distant in time like Dante. As Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus has demonstrated, the historically oriented brand of positivism found elsewhere in Taine’s writings, notably in his comments on French literature, goes far beyond the mechanics of mere causality, towards a hermeneutics of ‘otherness’.⁶³ Taine appreciates the historically specific aesthetics of bygone ages, not in relation to present standards,

⁵⁷ Scepticism with regard to hermeneutics pervades Foucault’s writings, e.g. M. Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, pp. 196 f. and p. 211. As for Rorty, his general critique of an independent point of view can be found in R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, whereas a more specifically anti-hermeneutic stand is taken in R. Rorty, ‘Representation, Social Practice and Truth’, in: *Philosophical Studies*, 54 (1989), pp. 215-228.

⁵⁸ For this term, see R.J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, Cambridge, Oxford, Boston, New York, Polity, 2010, p. 109.

⁵⁹ See R. Rorty, ‘Representation’, cit., p. 220.

⁶⁰ H.-H. Kögler, *Die Macht des Dialogs. Kritische Hermeneutik nach Gadamer, Foucault und Rorty*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1992, pp. 254-290.

⁶¹ For the theory of fiction as make-believe, see K. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe. On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990.

⁶² H. Taine, *Voyage en Italie*, 2 vols., Paris, Hachette, 1866, p. 6.

⁶³ Cfr. U. Schulz-Buschhaus, ‘Hippolyte Taine als Literaturwissenschaftler oder die Hermeneutik der Alterität’, in: *Sprachkunst*, 31 (2000), pp. 85-103.

but in their own right. Taine the supercilious traveller through Italy, therefore, lags behind the standard set by Taine the theorist.

Like the other conceptions of empathetic reading presented in this article, the passage cited from Taine's *Voyage* owes much to what one might call the 'l'homme et l'œuvre' complex. It is therefore fitting to present the champion of this approach, Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, as our last reader of Dante – even though he is not one of the Dante travellers. His way of reading Dante will turn out to be more complex than that of the others, because it consciously opts for a clearly sentimental approach, yet at the same time concedes the possibility of an alternative, more historically informed reading.

Sainte-Beuve, too, criticises the superficial Dantomania of his age.⁶⁴ In his *Causerie* of Monday 11th December 1854, he discusses Mesnard's new translation of Dante's *Comedy*. Sainte-Beuve recounts how recent developments in France have produced a more balanced view of Dante. In this context, he stresses that, for him, Dante's greatest achievement is that of a language of emotion, of words 'qui fixent la note inimitable de la passion, et qui se répéteront telles qu'il les a dites, tant qu'il y aura des hommes'.⁶⁵

He then focuses on an episode he rightly thinks central to the poem, but which is more often than not overlooked by his fellow countrymen (though, incidentally, translated by Deschamps in his *Dernières paroles*): Beatrice's apparition in the Earthly Paradise. As Sainte-Beuve is interested predominantly in Dante the emotional poet, he first gently dismisses the important allegories of the scene: 'leur commentaire est à jamais écrit dans tous les cœurs délicats et sensibles'⁶⁶ – which can be taken to mean: Sensitive hearts rather than erudite comments will make sense of them. But almost immediately afterwards, he reactivates the allegorical level, if not out of his own interests, at least for Dante's sake: Dante is, as he writes, 'un génie compliqué',⁶⁷ a poet of many levels of signification, and therefore he may have created a kind of double coding. In Sainte-Beuve, a strong personal preference for one reading (a sentimental one) coexists with an awareness of an aspect of historical otherness, an allegorical level seemingly in contradiction to the preferred sentimental reading. Sainte-Beuve seems to accept that, unlike himself, Dante follows a complex poetics that can reconcile these contrasting levels of sense.

As may have become clear, the reception of Dante contributes to the development of new ways of dealing with otherness in the French 19th century, be it in a spatial-cultural sense as exemplified in the literary journeys analysed in this article, or in a temporal sense as a medieval poet. In some cases, reading Dante can pave the way to an intercultural dialogue between France and Italy. Whether the reception of Dante is historically informed, philological, critical, superficial or based on misconceptions, it is predominantly sentimental. This manner of dealing with Dante turned out to be remarkably fertile and in turn triggered the production not only of new texts, both literary and erudite, but also of other works of art. While the literary reception of Dante began to dwindle with the end of romantic and the beginning of realist writing,⁶⁸

⁶⁴ C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, XI, Paris, Garnier frères, 1856, p. 176; all quotes by Sainte-Beuve are also cited in Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics*, cit., pp. 240 and 247.

⁶⁵ Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, XI, p. 175.

⁶⁶ *Ivi*, p. 176.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ See also Friederich, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, cit., p. 179 f. One reason for the ebbing of literary reception might be the fact that Dante is hard to imitate. A.F. Villemain had already declared this in his *Cours de littérature française*, 1828-1829: 'Il [le poème du Dante] est resté comme un monument original qui n'a point servi de modèle. On imite Shakespeare [...] et Schiller semble parfois atteindre jusqu'à lui. Je ne sache pas qu'on ait imité Dante' (A. F. Villemain, *Cours de littérature française*, cit., p. 313 f.).

other forms of artistic expression started to focus again on his work, chiefly on the *Inferno*, from Bouguereau's painting, Liszt's sonata 'Après une lecture du Dante', Doré's illustrations of the *Comedy* up to Rodin's *Porte de l'enfer*, to name but a few. But that is another story...⁶⁹

Keywords

Dante, French Romanticism, intercultural hermeneutics, literary journeys, imagology

Florian Mehlretter holds the chair of Italian Literature at Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University. His books include *Die unmögliche Tragödie. Karnevalisierung und Gattungsmischung im venezianischen Opernlibretto des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt/M, Lang, 1994; *Der Text unserer Natur. Studien zu Illuminismus und Aufklärung in Frankreich in der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen, Narr, 2009; and *Kanonisierung und Medialität. Petrarca's Rime in der Frühzeit des Buchdrucks (1470-1687)*, Münster, LIT, 2009. His research interests focus on the Trecento, Cinquecento, Dante reception, poetic theory, and opera.

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Institut für Italienische Philologie
Schellingstr. 3
80799 Munich (Germany)
florian.mehlretter@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

Juana von Stein works as an academic assistant in the Department of Romance Studies and the Petrarca Institute at the University of Cologne. Her doctoral thesis, *Melancholie als poetologische Allegorie. Zu Baudelaire und Flaubert*, was published by De Gruyter (Berlin/Boston) in 2018. She is currently working on the reception of pre-modern Italian literature in France and prepares a second book (habilitation), dedicated to the myth of Don Juan.

Universität zu Köln
Romanisches Seminar/Petrarca-Institut
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
50923 Cologne (Germany)
juana.von-stein@uni-koeln.de

⁶⁹ This is part of a research project on the reception of pre-modern Italian 'classics' in the French 19th century, recently started by the authors of this article.

RIASSUNTO

Sulle orme di Dante

Viaggi sentimentali in Italia nella letteratura del primo Ottocento francese

Nel corso del Diciannovesimo secolo l'atteggiamento dei francesi nei confronti dell'Italia è alquanto ambiguo, compreso tra una posa di superiorità 'coloniale' esercitata su un paese (ancora) disgregato e arretrato e la venerazione per geni letterari come Dante e Tasso. Dante soprattutto, affascina l'universo artistico e letterario francese durante tutto il secolo. Scrittori quali Lamartine o Hugo, così come pittori e musicisti, sono attratti sia dalla sua personalità, sia dal suo *Inferno*, la cantica indiscutibilmente più letta del poema dantesco. L'ambiguità risulta particolarmente ovvia nei viaggi sulle orme di Dante compiuti in Italia dagli scrittori francesi del Diciannovesimo secolo, che enfatizzano particolarmente il processo di identificazione emotiva. Si pensi qui a Chateaubriand, che nel 1828 viaggia attraverso l'Italia assumendo la posa di un nuovo Alighieri, sebbene la sua conoscenza dell'opera di quest'ultimo sia piuttosto approssimativa. La sua identificazione con Dante, tuttavia, non sembra oltrepassare la semplice imitazione delle vicissitudini del Poeta e punta principalmente a forgiare un'immagine letteraria della sua persona. In maniera analoga, Jean-Jacques Ampère, nel suo *Voyage dantesque* (1839), predilige un approccio basato anch'esso sulle emozioni, ma le vaste conoscenze di storia della letteratura di Ampère consentono a quest'ultimo di sviluppare un atteggiamento critico più raffinato. Pertanto, la sua capacità di immedesimazione non consiste in una semplice imitazione, bensì in una comprensione più profonda dell'opera dantesca, che conduce Ampère non solamente a elogiare l'Italia rinascimentale, ma, addirittura, ad arrivare a mettere in discussione alcuni aspetti della cultura francese. Si delinea quindi un processo che, similmente a ciò che Dilthey chiamerà, in seguito, *Einfuehlung*, apporta un cambiamento profondo nella percezione dell' 'altro' culturale, aprendo alla possibilità di un'ermeneutica interculturale tra la Francia e l'Italia.